

Analysis of Project Management Job Advertisements in Sri Lanka: Implications for Entry-Level Graduates

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ABSTRACT

This study examines project management job advertisements in Sri Lanka to understand current labour market requirements and their implications for entry-level graduates. The study objectives are to identify the main industry sectors offering project management jobs, examine the educational qualifications and professional certifications required by employers, determine the technical tools and soft skills demanded, and analyze experience requirements across different positions. A quantitative content analysis was conducted using 100 project management job advertisements collected from LinkedIn, LankaJob.lk, and professional recruitment networks between 2025 and 2026. While the primary focus is on entry-level transition dynamics, the sample deliberately encompasses a range of positions from junior-level to senior-level roles. This holistic sampling framework allows emerging graduates to identify not only immediate workforce entry baselines but also long-term career progression benchmarks necessary for strategic vertical mobility. The selected advertisements were coded and analyzed using frequency distributions and cross-tabulation. The findings show that project management vacancies were mainly concentrated in the IT, Software and Telecommunications sector (35%) and the Construction and Civil Engineering sector (34%). A Bachelor's degree was the most frequently required educational qualification, appearing in 74 advertisements. Furthermore, PMP was the most frequently requested professional certification (N=23), followed by Scrum Master (N=10) and PRINCE2 (N=9). Regarding technical skills, JIRA and MS Office Suite were each mentioned in 21 advertisements, while MS Project appeared in 19. Communication was the most frequently demanded soft skill (N=45), followed by stakeholder and vendor management (N=38), leadership and team management (N=34), and coordination skills (N=32). However, experience requirements differed across industry sectors. The IT, Software and Telecommunications sector showed comparatively greater opportunities for graduates and early-career candidates, as 42.9% of its vacancies required no experience or only 1–2 years of experience. In contrast, the Construction and Civil Engineering sector had higher experience requirements, with a larger proportion of vacancies requiring five or more years of experience. The study concludes that employer expectations differ across project management sectors. Therefore, graduates should develop practical experience, technical tool knowledge, professional qualifications, and soft skills alongside their academic education. Universities and professional institutions should strengthen practical learning opportunities, including internships, project-based learning, and training in industry-relevant project management tools, to better align graduate competencies with labour market requirements.

Keywords: Project Management; Job Advertisements; Graduate Employability; Labour Market Requirements; Sri Lanka.

INTRODUCTION

Projects serve as the primary vehicle for achieving organizational value through goal-oriented governance seekers (Al-Mughairy & Shrivastava, 2022). Project management has evolved into a core operational capability across diverse global industries, including Information Technology (IT), manufacturing, apparel, construction, engineering, banking, finance, insurance, telecommunications, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Akkermans et al., 2020; Selvarajan et al., 2021). Recent forecast indicates a global demand for nearly 30 million project professionals by 2030, underscoring the urgent need for structured upskilling among emergent job seekers (Al-Mughairy & Shrivastava, 2022). Rapid technological

advancements driven by Industry 4.0 are continuously diversifying the roles, responsibilities, and competencies required of project management practitioners. This shift demands dynamic and upgraded skill sets to navigate complex business challenges (Al-Mughairy & Shrivastava, 2022; Selvarajan et al., 2021).

For fresh university graduates, entry-level positions represent the primary mechanism to transition academic knowledge into professional competency. However, employer expectations for entry-level roles vary significantly across different industrial sectors, particularly regarding the required combinations of formal educational qualifications, professional certifications, technical tools, soft skills, and prior experiential baselines (Al-Mughairy & Shrivastava, 2022; Berenguer et al., 2024; Iwko et al., 2025).

Job advertisements alternatively conceptualized as employment postings or vacancy announcements serve as an empirical bridge between recruitment demands and applicant profiles and offering real-time insights into contemporary labor market trends and institutional expectations (Antony & George, 2021; Berenguer et al., 2024; Mahjoub & Kruyen, 2021). Investigating the contents of these advertisements provides a systematic methodology for identifying the exact qualifications valued by employers. This enables students and educators to comprehend the operational realities of modern project management paths.

The development of specialized university curricula aims to prime this professional workforce pipeline. Local graduates face an increasingly unpredictable labor market shaped by rapid technological shifts and macroeconomic instability (Selvarajan et al., 2021; Weerasinghe, 2026). While formal higher education remains a critical pathway to employment, specialized qualifications from private professional institutions also contribute substantially to graduate employability (Bopagamage & Bopagamage, 2024; Fernando et al., 2022; Iwko et al., 2025). Currently, the University of Vavuniya stands as the sole state institution offering a dedicated undergraduate degree program in project management (Selvarajan et al., 2021). However, multiple state and private universities offer degrees in highly relevant technical disciplines such as engineering, information technology, computer science, architecture, and quantity surveying where graduates routinely transition into specialized project management roles. An empirical analysis of project management vacancies is vital not only for specialized project management students but also for technical graduates from related disciplines seeking to understand how their academic qualifications align with sectoral demands.

Despite these educational pathways, graduate unemployment and underemployment remain persistent socioeconomic challenges in Sri Lanka (Bopagamage & Bopagamage, 2024; Fernando et al., 2022; Weerasinghe, 2026). A primary structural driver of this issue is the prevailing skills mismatch between the competencies cultivated within university environments and the evolving requirements of the labor market (Algama Bopagamage & Bopagamage, 2024; Aysha & Sulaiha Beevi, 2022). Due to the highly conceptual and theoretical nature of traditional university curriculums, fresh graduates frequently struggle with a lack of practical exposure, technical tool proficiencies, and behavioral soft skills demanded by employers (Algama Bopagamage & Bopagamage, 2024; Weerasinghe, 2026). Under these market conditions, an undergraduate degree alone is seldom sufficient to secure employment, creating an escalating reliance on additional professional qualifications (Aysha & Sulaiha Beevi, 2022; Fernando et al., 2022). This systemic imbalance raises critical empirical questions regarding the exact combination of skills and attributes employers expect from applicants.

While global literature extensively documents changing industry demands and project management competency frameworks, there is a distinct paucity of localized empirical evidence analyzing employer expectations within the Sri Lankan context. Previous studies have examined job advertisements to map requirements across various professional domains, yet limited attention has been paid to systematically decoding project management vacancies in Sri Lanka specifically regarding industry distributions, technical tools, soft skills, and the hierarchy of experience requirements.

Crucially, to provide actionable implications for entry-level graduates, this study expands its analytical scope beyond entry-level roles to capture mid- and senior-tier project management vacancies. This holistic sampling strategy allows entry-level graduates to not only identify the minimum baselines required for immediate workforce entry but also to map out long-term career progression tracks and future competency benchmarks

necessary for professional growth and strategic toolsets required for vertical career mobility within the Sri Lankan labor market.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research objectives,

1. To identify the primary industry sectors offering project management jobs in Sri Lanka.
2. To evaluate the educational qualifications and professional certifications required by local employers.
3. To determine the most sought-after technical tools and soft skills demanded by employers.
4. To analyze the prevalence and patterns of experience requirements to map out career progression expectations for entering graduates.

Consequently, the findings of this study offer valuable empirical insights for several key stakeholder groups.

Provides a transparent roadmap of the exact combinations of skills, certifications, and technical tools currently demanded by employers, thereby enhancing their strategic readiness and mitigating the initial transition gap into the workforce for undergraduates and graduates. For Higher Education Institutions, it delivers data-driven feedback to help curriculum designers and academic faculties align university programs with real-time labor market demands, fostering targeted skill development in technical and allied disciplines. Industry Employers will offer a benchmark overview of current recruitment trends, standard requirements, and competency hierarchies across competing sectors in Sri Lanka. For Academic Researchers, establishes a concrete, localized empirical baseline for future investigations into the evolution of project management, skills gaps, and graduate employability dynamics in emerging economies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Capital Theory posits that an individual's investments in education, training, and skill development expand their intrinsic productive capacity, which the labor market recognizes and rewards through heightened employability and earnings potential (Weerasuriya, 2026). However, traditional interpretations of this theory assume a linear relationship where higher educational attainment automatically converts into labor market stability. Recent changes in highly competitive and unstable markets challenge this strict rule (Omar et al., 2026; Weerasuriya, 2026). In contemporary labour markets, human capital extends beyond formal educational qualifications to include professional certifications, technical competencies, soft skills, and practical work experience. These additional forms of human capital may enhance an individual's ability to demonstrate job readiness and meet the specific competency requirements expected by employers. Therefore, the value of human capital depends not only on the level of education attained but also on the relevance and combination of competencies developed in relation to changing labour market demands.

Deng (2026) observes that when massive group of highly educated candidates enter an unaligned or contracting economic landscape, traditional human capital expectations can suffer structural breakdowns. In such crowded conditions, basic degree qualifications lose their individual signaling power, forcing job seekers to accumulate specialized forms of non-formal human capital to successfully clear employer recruitment filters. Within project management, this diversification of human capital is highly structured, requiring specific academic credentials, professional certifications, Skills, and practical, hands-on experience.

To overcome the limitations of basic degree signals, the accumulation of specialized professional certifications becomes essential. Farashah et al. (2019) and Cunningham (2019) demonstrate that active, professional certifications significantly improve labor force participation rates and lower overall unemployment risks for practitioners. In project-driven environments, specific certifications like the Project Management Institute's (PMI) Project Management Competency Development Framework alignments or the International Project Management Association (IPMA) credentials independently validate context-specific human capital. These designations, such as PMP, Scrum Master, and PRINCE2, act as a secondary layer of market signaling, offering recruiters a standardized mechanism to verify an applicant's technical capabilities and procedural expertise.

The internal composition of project management capital can be systematically evaluated through Horváth's (2019) integrated two-dimensional competency matrix. The vertical dimension focuses on structural components like baseline knowledge and qualifications. The horizontal dimension explicitly categorizes functional knowledge areas, emphasizing the balance between technical execution and human relationship management. In the contemporary landscape of Industry 4.0, this dual-competency structure faces distinct evolutionary demands.

The horizontal dimension places an immense premium on behavioral soft skills. Because project environments require professionals to drive execution across cross-functional spaces without absolute organizational authority, capabilities such as comprehensive verbal and written communication, leadership, and external stakeholder governance are paramount. Al-Mughairy and Shrivastava (2022) point out that as digital platforms automate the mechanical aspects of scheduling and project tracking, the core value of a project professional shifts heavily toward behavioral alignment and complex problem-solving. This makes it essential for entering graduates to hold a balanced combination of hard tool mastery and soft human skills.

Empirical evidence from Sri Lankan state universities underlines this requirement, revealing that a lack of direct industry experience is a major constraint for 32.3% of graduates struggling to find suitable employment. Conversely, 21.5% of successfully employed management graduates explicitly cite prior work exposure as the primary reason for securing their positions (Fernando et al., 2023). To mitigate this constraint, Kumari and Adikaram (2026) emphasize the critical role of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) initiatives, such as formal internships, apprenticeships, and project-based learning, embedded directly into university degree programs. These programs are highly effective at boosting graduate outcomes and closing the gap between academic theory and real-world practice.

Drawing on Human Capital Theory, this study views educational qualifications, professional certifications, technical competencies, soft skills, and practical experience as forms of human capital that may influence employability. Horváth's (2019) competency framework further provides a structure for categorizing the project management competencies identified in job advertisements.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted quantitative content analysis approach, utilizing frequency distribution profiling. This method is highly effective for converting qualitative textual data extracted from corporate vacancy announcements into structured metrics. Data collection targeted prominent professional networks and job portals in Sri Lanka, specifically LinkedIn, lankajob.lk, and specialized industry-led professional WhatsApp recruitment channels.

Sampling Framework and Selection Criteria

The initial data sweep yielded 175 job advertisements. To ensure data relevance, historical validity, and contextual alignment, a strict purposive sampling framework filtered these raw listings down to a finalized dataset of 100 distinct job advertisements based on the following inclusion criteria.

Advertisements must have been actively published between 2025 and 2026 to capture contemporary post-pandemic marketplace realities.

The advertisements had to clearly list main project management duties, ways to measure success, and what qualifications applicants need

The sample was deliberately structured across the complete institutional hierarchy ranging from entry-level interns and junior coordinators to senior project managers. This multi-tiered sampling strategy establishes an empirical baseline for entry-level candidates while mapping out the progressive capability demands required for large-scale enterprise execution. Project management intern postings were included only when they contained exhaustive competency and requirement details.

Coding Strategy and Data Validity

To enhance consistency and transparency in the coding process, the researcher applied an iterative five-pass text screening and coding protocol to each advertisement. The semantic content of the job descriptions was analyzed using two distinct frequency distribution models based on parameter behavior,

Single-Response Mutually Exclusive Framework

Applied strictly to structural parameters where an advertisement specifies only one baseline position, specifically industry distribution (Table 1) and minimum professional experience brackets (Table 6). This strict mutual exclusivity ensures that cumulative frequencies aggregate to exactly 100%, allowing for clear cross-sectional baseline assessments. Furthermore, to evaluate how professional entry barriers and seniority profiles shift across distinct market segments, a cross-tabulation analysis was executed, pairing industry categories with experience brackets (Table 7) to uncover deep structural patterns within the labor market.

Multiple-Response Frequency Framework

Applied to the analysis of educational qualification (Table 2), professional certifications (Table 3), technical tools (Table 4), and soft skills (Table 5). This model acknowledges that a single vacancy announcement frequently lists multiple acceptable qualifications or a complex blend of tool and skills. Information in these sections was separated, sorted into specific groups, and counted based on how often they appeared.

To ensure content validity and consistency in the semantic classification process, an iterative, five-pass text-screening protocol was applied using a standardized coding dictionary derived from Horváth's (2019) two-dimensional competency matrix. In the initial pass, all files were verified against the predefined inclusion criteria. The second pass focused on identifying and classifying structural sectoral metrics. The third and fourth passes mapped formal qualifications, tracking tools, and soft skills into distinct categories. The fifth pass verified year-based experiential requirements.

As the coding was conducted by a single researcher, inter-coder reliability was not assessed; however, repeated coding and iterative verification were employed to enhance consistency in the classification process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Distribution of Project Management Job Advertisements by Industry Category

Industry Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
IT, Software & Telecommunications	35	35
Construction & Civil Engineering	34	34
Other Sectors (NGO, Education, Agriculture, Banking)	21	21
Consulting, BPO & Advisory	10	10
Total	100	100

Source: Analysis of secondary recruitment data (2026).

The IT, Software & Telecommunications sector (35%) and the Construction & Civil Engineering sector (34%) emerge as the two major sectors for project management vacancies in Sri Lanka, collectively constituting over two-thirds (69%) of market demand. This large focus happens because software development, technology setups, and construction work are all organized around specific projects.

A significant baseline of vacancies (21%) spans mixed sectors, including Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), educational management, agriculture, and commercial banking networks. Corporate consulting, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), and strategic advisory units comprise the remaining (10%). These

findings demonstrate that project management has transformed into a universally applicable operational domain across the Sri Lankan labor market.

Table 2: Educational Qualifications Mentioned in Project Management Job Advertisements

Educational Qualification	Frequency
Bachelor's Degree	74
Master's Degree	10
Diploma, Higher Diploma, Higher National Diploma	16
Other Qualifications	4

Source: Analysis of secondary recruitment data (2026).

Note: Total counts reflect a multiple-response framework.

According to Table 2, a bachelor's degree was the most frequently required educational qualification among employers, appearing in 74 of the 100 job advertisements analysed. A master's degree was specified in only 10 advertisements, suggesting that postgraduate qualifications were primarily associated with higher-level project management positions. In addition to university-level qualifications, diplomas, higher diplomas, and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) were also identified as relevant educational pathways, appearing in 16 instances. Other qualifications, primarily related to vocational training, appeared less frequently, with only four instances recorded.

Table 3: Professional Certifications by Industry Sector

Professional Certification	IT, Software & Telecommunications	Construction & Civil Engineering	Consulting, BPO & Advisory	Other Sectors	Total Counts
PMP (Project Management Professional)	5	12	2	4	23
Scrum Master	8	0	1	1	10
PRINCE2	4	0	3	2	9
Agile Certifications (General frameworks)	6	0	1	1	8
Scrum Certifications (General)	4	0	0	1	5
CAPM (Certified Associate in PM)	1	1	0	0	2
Finance Pack (ICASL / CIMA / ACCA)	0	0	0	1	1
Lean, Six Sigma	0	0	0	1	1
PMI-ACP (Agile Certified Practitioner)	1	0	0	0	1
Total Certificate Mentions	29	13	7	11	60

Source: Analysis of secondary recruitment data (2026).

Note: Total counts reflect a multiple-response framework.

Table 3 presents professional certification requirements by industry sector in Sri Lanka. The Project Management Professional (PMP) credential represents the most demanded qualification across the dataset,

accumulating 23 total mentions. Sectoral data show that PMP demand is highest in the Construction & Civil Engineering sector with 12 mentions, followed by IT, Software & Telecom with 5 mentions, and Other Sectors with 4 mentions. Agile and scrum-specific qualifications dictate hiring requirements within the IT, Software & Telecom vertical, accounting for 19 combined mentions. This tech-sector demand includes 8 mentions for Scrum Master, 6 for General Agile, 4 for General Scrum, and 1 for PMI-ACP. The PRINCE2 framework displays a distinct distribution, led by IT, Software & Telecom (4 mentions) and Consulting & BPO (3 mentions). Introductory qualifications like the Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM) register a negligible market share with only 2 total mentions, split equally between the IT and Construction verticals. Highly specialized credentials, specifically the Finance Pack and Lean Six Sigma, record only 1 mention each, restricted entirely to Other Sectors. These findings suggest that employers place greater emphasis on sector-specific professional certifications rather than generalized credentials.

Table 4: Technical Tools by Industry Vertical

Technical Tool Category	Specific Tool	IT, Software & Telecommunications	Construction & Civil Engineering	Consulting, BPO & Advisory	Other Sectors	Total Counts
Project Tracking	JIRA	15	0	3	3	21
	Trello, Asana, ClickUp	4	0	2	2	8
	Confluence	5	0	1	0	6
	Smartsheet, Azure DevOps	3	0	1	0	4
Productivity and Reporting	MS Office Suite	6	7	2	6	21
	MS Teams, Slack, Zoom	3	1	1	1	6
Planning and Scheduling	MS Project	5	10	1	3	19
	Primavera P6	0	4	0	0	4
Design	AutoCAD	0	11	0	0	11
	3D Modelling	0	2	0	0	2
Analytics and Visuals	Power BI, Dashboards	3	1	1	1	6
	Figma, Visio, Draw.io	2	0	1	0	3
Total Tool Mentions		46	36	14	17	113

Source: Analysis of secondary recruitment data (2026).

Note: Total counts reflect a multiple-response framework.

Table 4 presents the distribution of technical tool requirements across specific industry sectors, demonstrating that software dependencies are strictly aligned with sector-specific operational workflows rather than distributed uniformly across the marketplace. Specialized engineering and architectural applications including AutoCAD (11 counts), Primavera P6 (4 counts), and 3D Modelling (2 counts) are restricted entirely to the Construction & Civil Engineering sector, where geometric design and complex scheduling requirements dictate project execution. Conversely, software development and agile lifecycle infrastructure define software requirements within the IT & Telecom vertical, which accounts for 15 out of 21 counts for JIRA, 5 out of 6

counts for Confluence, and 3 out of 4 counts for Azure DevOps/Smart sheet. Collaborative productivity platforms, led by the MS Office Suite (21 total counts), display a balanced cross-sector presence, establishing them as baseline operational requirements regardless of industry classification. These quantitative metrics prove that entering graduates must acquire highly targeted tool proficiencies tailored to their specific destination sectors to satisfy employer screening filters.

Table 5: Soft Skills Mentioned in The Project Management Job Advertisement

Soft Skills	IT, Software & Telecommunication	Construction & Civil Engineering	Consulting , BPO & Advisory	Other Sectors	Total
Interpersonal & Interaction					
Communication (Verbal, Written, Multilingual)	16	15	5	9	45
Stakeholder, Vendor Management	12	14	4	8	38
Client Coordination and Meetings	4	3	8	3	18
Leadership & Governance					
Leadership , Team Management	12	12	3	7	34
Team Mentoring and Coaching	5	3	1	3	12
Execution & Efficiency					
Coordination & Cross-Functional Alignment	11	11	3	7	32
Planning & Timeline Tracking	5	7	1	3	16
Multi-Project Management, Multitasking	4	4	1	3	12
Time Management, Meeting Deadlines	3	3	1	2	9
Cognitive & Operational					
Problem-Solving , Troubleshooting	10	10	3	6	29
Analytical Thinking and Skills	6	5	2	3	16
Risk Management and Mitigation	4	6	1	3	14
Attention to Detail, Meticulous Nature	3	3	1	1	8
Working Under Pressure, Fast-Paced Adaptability	3	2	1	1	7
Total soft skills mentions	98	98	35	59	290

Source: Analysis of secondary recruitment data (2026)

Note: Total counts reflect a multiple-response framework.

According to table 5, The cross-tabulation analysis of soft skill across different industry segments exposes critical patterns regarding how employers screen behavioral capabilities. Rather than showing a uniform distribution, the data reveals both baseline requirements across the board and highly specialized industry preferences.

The Interpersonal and Interaction pillar accounts for the highest single concentrations of text matches in the dataset. Communication (45 counts) and Stakeholder & Vendor Management (38 counts) are evenly distributed across the IT, Software & Telecommunication and Construction & Civil Engineer sectors. This even distribution proves that cross-functional communication acts as a commonly required entry gate across the entire labor market, regardless of the sector's technical focus.

A clear variation appears in Client Coordination & Meetings, where the small Consulting, BPO & Advisory sector accounts for nearly half of all market mentions (8 out of 18 counts). This high concentration proves that advisory and outsourcing roles place a heavy premium on direct client management and external communication channels compared to internal execution sectors.

While general project coordination shows balanced cross-sector values, Planning & Timeline Tracking is visibly skewed toward the Construction & Civil Engineer sector (7 counts vs. 5 in IT). This focus highlights the rigid, predictive constraints of physical infrastructure setups, where missed timelines carry severe financial penalties. Conversely, the high-velocity IT sector shows higher relative values in Team Mentoring & Coaching (5 counts), aligning with its focus on Agile structures and continuous team support.

Table 6: Prevalence and Patterns of Experience Requirements in Project Management Job Advertisements

Experience (Years)	Frequency	Primary Role Typology
No Experience	9	fresh graduates, junior tracking support
1 – 2 Years	22	Associate PMs, corporate planning, entry coordinators
3 – 4 Years	22	Technical PMs, Agile, Scrum leads, site coordinators
5 – 6 Years	24	Senior PMs, client-side representatives, commercial builders
7 – 9 Years	8	PMO specialists, fintech Scrum Masters, ERP delivery leads
10 – 14 Years	11	High-scale civil infrastructure, marine engineering
15+ Years	4	Mega water projects, senior public sector directors
Total	100	

Source: Source: Analysis of secondary recruitment data (2026).

According to Table 6, the most common level of experience was 5–6 years with 24 project management job ads, followed by 3–4 years with 22 project management job ads. Another 9 advertisements did not require any prior experience; these tended to be fresh graduates or junior-level positions while 22 advertisements required 1-2 years of experience. The experience requirements were less common, with 8 of the ads asking for 7-9 years, 11 for 10-14and just 4 for 15+, or more, years. Overall, the results suggest employers are looking for project management staff at varying levels of experience, with the most common experience level being between 0-6 years.

Table 7: Experience Requirements in Project Management Job Advertisements by Industry Sector

Experience Level	IT, Software & Telecommunications (n=35)	Construction & Civil Engineering (n=34)	Consulting & BPO (n=10)	Other sectors (n=21)	Total (N=100)
No Experience	5 (14.3%)	1 (2.9%)	1 (10.0%)	2 (9.5%)	9 (9.0%)

1–2 Years	10 (28.6%)	5 (14.7%)	2 (20.0%)	5 (23.8%)	22 (22.0%)
3–4 Years	9 (25.7%)	6 (17.6%)	2 (20.0%)	5 (23.8%)	22 (22.0%)
5–6 Years	8 (22.9%)	9 (26.5%)	2 (20.0%)	5 (23.8%)	24 (24.0%)
7–9 Years	2 (5.7%)	3 (8.8%)	1 (10.0%)	2 (9.5%)	8 (8.0%)
10–14 Years	1 (2.9%)	7 (20.6%)	2 (20.0%)	1 (4.8%)	11 (11.0%)
15+ Years	0 (0.0%)	3 (8.8%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.8%)	4 (4.0%)
Total	35 (100%)	34 (100%)	10 (100%)	21 (100%)	100 (100%)

Source: Analysis of secondary recruitment data (2026).

Table 7 demonstrates variation in experience requirements across the four industry categories. The IT, Software and Telecommunications sector showed comparatively greater opportunities for early-career candidates, with 15 of the 35 advertisements (42.9%) requiring no experience or only 1–2 years of experience. In contrast, the Construction and Civil Engineering sector showed a greater concentration of positions requiring higher levels of experience. In this sector, 22 advertisements (64.7%) required five or more years of experience, compared with 11 advertisements (31.4%) in the IT sector. The Construction and Civil Engineering sector also recorded the highest proportion of advertisements requiring 10–14 years of experience (20.6%) and 15 or more years of experience (8.8%). These findings indicate that experience requirements are not uniform across project management employment sectors. The results therefore suggest that graduates entering the labour market may encounter different experience expectations depending on the industry in which they seek employment.

CONCLUSION

This study executed a quantitative content analysis of 100 project management job advertisements in Sri Lanka to evaluate contemporary employer expectations and providing critical empirical guideposts for entry-level graduates. The empirical findings reveal that project management hiring activity is heavily dominated by the IT, Software & Telecommunications (35%) and Construction & Civil Engineering (34%) sectors. Synthesizing these sectoral demands with the structural metrics of the labor market reveals clear patterns regarding how qualifications, tools, skills, and experience profiles are valued by local recruiters.

When evaluated through Horváth's (2019) integrated two-dimensional competency matrix, the vertical elements of formal education and professional certifications reveal distinct signaling functions within the Sri Lankan context. A Bachelor's Degree represents the standard vertical foundation for corporate market entry, required in 74% of the evaluated advertisements. However, as noted by Deng (2026), when massive group of highly educated candidates enter a contracting or unaligned economic landscape, traditional human capital expectations suffer a structural breakdown. In such environments, basic degree qualifications lose their individual signaling power, explaining why local employers heavily look to specialized professional certifications to verify actual job readiness. The findings indicate that PMP was more frequently mentioned in the Construction and Civil Engineering sector, whereas Agile and Scrum-related certifications were more common in the IT, Software and Telecommunications sector. This sectoral variation suggests that employers may value certifications that align with the dominant project delivery approaches within their respective industries. This finding is consistent with the competency literature emphasizing the contextual nature of project management capabilities (Horváth, 2019).

Horváth's (2019) horizontal dimension reveals a clear dual-competency paradox between technical tool mastery and soft skills. While technical software tool proficiency in JIRA (21 counts) and MS Project (19 counts) is a standard operational requirement for tracking and scheduling, it is consistently outpaced by interpersonal governance demands, led by Comprehensive Communication (45 counts) and Stakeholder Management (38 counts). This distribution indicates that as automated platforms and digital workspaces standardize routine project reporting, the core human capital value of a project professional shifts heavily toward cross-functional alignment, matrix navigation, and complex behavioral problem-solving.

Crucially, the study's structural mapping of professional experience requirements (Table 6) and cross-sectoral cross-tabulations (Table 7) challenges the assumption that entry-level candidates face a uniform barrier to entry. While early-career paths (0–2 years) represent 31% of the total market, corporate demand peaks significantly in the mid-career range of 1 to 6 years (68%), illustrating a rapid transition toward independent project execution. The cross-tabulation reveals that while the IT vertical offers lower initial barriers to entry (42.8% of its roles require 0-2 years), the Construction sector restricts entry-level hiring, reserving 64.7% of its vacancies for mid- to senior-tier practitioners with 5 to 14+ years of experience.

This dynamic directly reflects the localized empirical realities documented by Fernando et al. (2023), who find that a lack of direct industry experience functions as a major constraint for 32.3% of Sri Lankan graduates trying to find suitable employment. Because 91% of project management advertisements mandate prior experience, a traditional degree alone is an insufficient entry point, reinforcing the critical need to couple academic qualification with early professional exposure.

Based on these insights, targeted actions are proposed for educational institutions and transitioning graduates:

For State Universities and professional institutions

To directly address the 32.3% graduate experience deficit, academic administrators must update traditional project management and technical curriculum by embedding structured Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) initiatives such as compulsory The Extended corporate internships or project-based field learning directly into degree lifecycles as strongly recommended by Kumari and Adikaram (2026). Participating in structured WIL initiatives bridges the gap between academic theory and real-world practice, significantly boosting graduate outcomes and post-graduation job performance. Furthermore, technical faculties (Engineering, IT, Quantity Surveying) must introduce hands-on laboratory modules focusing on industry-standard project tracking software and formal interpersonal communication workshops to better align graduate profiles with sectoral labor market expectations.

Higher education institutions and professional training providers should consider expanding access to introductory project management credentials and tool-based training to align student competencies with marketplace expectations. Simultaneously, academic departments can partner with corporate entities to subsidize official examination fees. This collaborative strategy enables students to graduate with both a university degree and a professional credential. Ultimately, this dual-qualification pathway provides entry-level graduates with the recognized industry validation needed to clear corporate screening filters despite a lack of formal work experience.

For Entry-Level Graduates

Entering job seekers cannot rely solely on an undergraduate degree to guarantee employment stability in a highly competitive market. Graduates must proactively diversify their personal human capital framework during their studies by building familiarity with digital tracking tools, pursuing early coordinator or tracking support roles in accessible fields like IT, and strategically tracking entry-level professional certifications (such as CAPM or foundational Scrum designations) to enhance their signaling power and support long-term vertical career mobility.

While this study provides valuable empirical mapping of the project management recruitment landscape in Sri Lanka, it is bounded by certain structural limitations that offer productive pathways for subsequent scholars. First, this investigation relied strictly on secondary content analysis of 100 online job advertisements over a specific temporal window (2025–2026). Vacancy announcements frequently function as an idealized organizational wish list and may not fully capture the exact tacit skills or hidden baseline requirements that emerge during formal interviews or internal corporate screening loops.

To overcome these descriptive boundaries, future researchers should adopt a mixed-methods primary data approach. Combining qualitative semi-structured interviews with quantitative surveys targeting project managers, corporate human resource recruiters, and recently employed entry-level graduates would provide

valuable insights. This empirical triangulation would allow researchers to validate whether the competency profiles demanded in public online postings match actual hiring choices and post-placement organizational performance metrics.

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